

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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INR-05 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02

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FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 629

C O N F I D E N T I A L MUSCAT 767

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MU

SUBJECT: CABINET CHANGES IN OMAN

REF: MUSCAT 724

1. DURING NOV. 17 EVENING BROADCAST, GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED "RADIO OMAN" ANNOUNCED MODIFICATION IN CABINET. ALTHOUGH PRESS RELEASE HAS NOT BEEN ISSUED, WE ARE ASSURED THAT CHANGES LISTED BELOW ARE OFFICIAL.

2. AS ANTICIPATED, MINHEALTH ASIM AL-JAMALI REPLACED; NEW MINISTER IS DR. MUBARAK AL-KHADURI. AL-KHADURI HAS MEDICAL DEGREE FROM UNIVERSITY OF BAGHDAD; HE SUBSEQUENTLY PASSED LONDON BOARDS. A RECENT RETURNEE TO OMAN, HE HELD MINHEALTH POSITION AT AL-NAHDA HOSPITAL PRIOR TO BEING NAMED MINISTER. DURING HIS RESIDENCE ABROAD (IN THE GULF, ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOT SURE EXACTLY WHERE) HE TOOK CARE TO MAINTAIN CONTACT WITH "ESTABLISHMENT" FIGURES SUCH AS FONMIN QAIS ZAWAWI; THIS CARE OBVIOUSLY HAS PAID OFF.

3. RESOLUTION OF ASIM AL-JAMALI'S STATUS IS LESS CLEAN CUT. ALTHOUGH EXACT TITLE IS NOT KNOWN JUST NOW, HE HAS BEEN RETAINED IN CABINET AS "ADVISER" OR AS MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO. THIS, OF COURSE, MAY JUST BE GRACEFUL WAY OF SHUNTING HIM ASIDE.

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4. ANOTHER BIT OF SPECULATION WHICH CAME TO PASS WAS DISSOLUTION OF MINISTRY OF DEVELOPMENT, TO BE REPLACED BY MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE (TO BE HEADED BY MUHAMMAD ZUBAIR) AND A MINISTRY WHICH WILL HANDLE FISHERIES, AGRICULTURE, PETROLEUM AND MINERALS (AS YET UNNAMED, BUT DEALING WITH RANGE OF NATURAL RESOURCES QUESTIONS); MINISTER OF LATTER WILL BE SAID AHMED AL-SHANFARI, A DHOFARI BUSINESSMAN. EMBASSY HAS NO BIO INFO IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE ON AL-SHANFARI.

5. MINISTRY OF INTERIOR AND JUSTICE BIFURCATED WITH SAYYID FAHAR BIN TAIMUR AL SAID TAKING OVER INTERIOR (HE ALSO CONTINUES AS UNDERSECRETARY OF DEFENSE) AND SAYYID HILAL BIN HAMAD AL-SAMMAR LEFT WITH ONLY JUSTICE FUNCTION. SAYYID FAHAR'S ASSUMPTION OF INTERIOR PORTFOLIO STRENGTHENS HANDLING OF ATTENDANT SECURITY- ORIENTED FUNCTIONS AT A TIME WHEN PFLO MAY BE METAMORPHOSING FROM GUERRILLA ARMY INTO TERRORIST GROUP.

6. IN PERHAPS MOST SURPRISING DEVELOPMENT, MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC WORKS ALSO SPLIT. ABDUL HAFIZ RAJAB REMAINS AS MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS; FORMER MINISTER OF DEVELOPMENT, KARIM AHMAD AL-HARAMI, BECOMES MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS. EMBASSY NOT SURE HOW RESPONSIBILITIES OF FORMER MINISTRY WILL BE SPLIT BETWEEN COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC WORKS, NOR HOW CHANGE MIGHT AFFECT THIS AREA WHICH PREVIOUSLY HAD GENERATED LARGEST NUMBER OF REQUESTS FOR VARIOUS TYPES OF USG ASSISTANCE AND US PRIVATE INVESTMENT. DIMINUTION OF ABDUL HAFIZ RAJAB'S RESPONSIBILITIES PARTIALLY OFFSET BY HIS INCLUSION IN DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL.

7. CABINET RANK OF WALI OF DHOFAR, SHAIKH BRAIK BIN HAMUD AL-GHAFARI, FORMALIZED THROUGH GRANTING STATUS AS MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO.

8. FINALLY, A DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL CREATED WITH DIRECT PARTICIPATION OF SULTAN. OTHER MEMBERS (IN ORDER GIVEN) ARE FONMIN ZAWAWI, MININTERIOR SAYYID FAHAR, MINHEALTH AL-KHADURI, MINCOMM RAJAB, MININDUSTRY AND COMMERCE ZUBAIR, MINISTER HANDLING NATURAL RESOURCES AL-SHANFARI, AND REPRESENTATIVE OF FINANCE DEPT (PRESUMABLY JOHN TOWNSEND).

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CHAIRMANSHIP (UNDER SULTAN) NOT SPECIFIED, ALTHOUGH WE BELIEVE ZAWAWI AT LEAST WILL BE "FIRST AMONG EQUALS". NO ANNOUNCEMENT MADE CONCERNING CREATION OF FINANCE COUNCIL.

9. COMMENT: MOST OF ANNOUNCED CHANGES SEEM TO HAVE BEEN PROMPTED BY FACTORS POINTED OUT IN REFTEL. HOWEVER, PROBLEM OF HANDLING INEFFECTIVE OR OUT-OF-FAVOR INDIVIDUALS WAS

ATTENUATED RATHER THAN SOLVED. NO ONE LOST OUT, AT LEAST
INSOFAR AS CABINET RANK AND SOME TITLE ARE CONCERNED. YET,
EMBASSY QUESTIONS WHETHER INCREASE IN NUMBER OF MINISTRIES
(FROM 13 TO 16) WILL MAKE FOR MORE EFFICIENT GOVERNMENTAL
OPERATION. SPLITTING OF TWO BUSY MINISTRIES (COMMUNICATIONS
AND PUBLIC WORKS AND DEVELOPMENT) MIGHT HAVE BEEN JUSTIFI-
ABLE BASED ON WORK LOAD, BUT SAME OBJECTIVE THEORETICALLY
COULD HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED BY APPOINTING STRONG, ABLE DEPUTIES
TO HANDLE RESPECTIVE AREAS WITHIN MORE CENTRALIZED STRUCTURE.
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